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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: AUGUST 10, 2009

Summary: Reports on the conflicting claims about the killing of notorious militant Baitullah Mahsud's in a U.S. drone attack continued to garner extensive media coverage on Monday. U.S. National Security Advisor James Jones's statement that he had seen "pretty conclusive" evidence that Baitullah had died in a drone attack received prominent display in all major newspapers. Pegged to it were reports quoting Pakistan Interior Minister Malik as "challenging" Taliban to "prove that their leader is still alive." The Foreign Office spokesman's statement denying "any drone attack accord with U.S." received wide coverage. Secretary Clinton's remarks that the "U.S. did a lot 'behind the scenes' to show support for demonstrators contesting Iran's disputing presidential election results" were also highlighted.

Most major newspapers ran editorials on the mystery about Baitullah Mehsud's fate and its potential consequences. The center-right Urdu daily "Pakistan," noted that "there can be no doubt in that Baitullah Mehsud's death and withdrawal of militants from Swat has strengthened Pakistan's position." The Lahore-based newspaper, "Daily Times," advised that "this is the time for Pakistan to move forward and reclaim its sovereignty from the Taliban." However, the Peshawar-based Urdu-language daily "Mashriq," observed that the "reports of killing of the Taliban warlord Baitullah Mehsud have given good reason for the U.S. drone attacks, as this is the first high-profile success for the United States, and it can try to convince the international community that its drone strikes aren't unjustified." End Summary.

News Stories

"Evidence 'Pretty Conclusive,' U.S. Official" "Dawn" (08/10)

"U.S. National Security Adviser Jim Jones said on Sunday he had seen 'pretty conclusive' evidence that Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud had died in a drone attack, Gen. Jones told NBC's 'Meet the Press' when asked if Baitullah had been killed in a U.S. missile strike on Wednesday."

"Malik Dares Taliban To Prove Mahsud Is Alive" "The New" (08/10)

"Interior Minister Rehman Malik has challenged the Taliban to prove their leaders are still alive, after reports that two of them have been killed in shootout at their Shoora meeting. Rehman Malik told the BBC officials physical evidence showed that the top commander, Baitullah Mehsud, was killed in a U.S. missile attack on Wednesday."

"DNA Test Soon, Says Interior Ministry" "Dawn" (08/10)

"Ambiguities about the death of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) chief Baitullah Mehsud will be over after DNA tests in two to three days, Interior Secretary Kamal Shah said on Sunday. 'Experts will match the DNA of Baitullah with that of his brother' the official told 'Dawn.'"

"U.S., Pakistan Believe Baitullah Is Dead; Taliban Deny Claim" "Dawn" (08/10)

"The U.S. and Pakistan are almost certain a U.S. missile strike killed Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan chief Baitullah Mehsud and that his death led to a fierce power struggle among his deputies, officials said on Sunday, despite claims and counter-claims as to the fate of the country's most wanted man."

"U.S. Reviewing Baitullah's Killing: Clinton" "The Post" (08/10)

"U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said that her government is taking stock of the matter of Baitullah Mehsud's killing, reported a private TV channel. She said, 'We are mulling over all the reports regarding the killing of Baitullah Mehsud.'"

"Baitullah Killing Seen As Major Blow To Taliban" "The News" (08/10)

"With a shattering stroke from the sky, the United States appeared to have dealt a major setback to extremist forces by killing the charismatic leader of the Pakistani Taliban. 'We've buried him more than once in the past. But assuming it is right, it is a pretty significant step. He became a symbol of the Taliban's war on the Pakistani state, much more than any other figure,' said Bruce Riedel, a former CIA Officer and White House Adviser."

"Hakeemullah And Wali Both Dead: Turkistan" "Dawn" (08/10)

"Baitullah Mehsud had been killed along with 40 militants in a drone strike last week and was buried in his house, says a commander of the rival group. Haji Turkistan Bhattani, a commander of the Abdullah Mehsud group, told various TV channels on Sunday that Qari Hussain, mastermind of several suicide attacks, was seriously injured in the attack. He said that Mufti Waliur Rehman and Hakeemullah Mehsud, the two leading contenders for the top slot, were also killed."

"Baitullah's Aide Says He Is Alive But Ill" "The News" (08/10)

"The mystery about Baitullah Mehsud's fate persisted on Sunday as one of his commanders maintained that he left his father-in-law's house before a U.S. drone attack that killed his wife. Maulana Noor Said, who described himself as a deputy to Baitullah, insisted that the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) founder and head survived the drone strike. However, he conceded that Baitullah was ill and in poor health."

"After Baitullah, Battle On For Taliban Treasure" "The News" (08/10)

"A bloody feud that followed Baitullah Mehsud's death involving about three-dozen best-trained Taliban fighters early on Wednesday morning was actually a battle among various Taliban warlords to control Rs 2 billion Taliban funds and ownership of arms and ammunition worth about Rs 1 billion by grabbing the 'Emarat' (the leadership) of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), according to senior security officials and knowledgeable Taliban sources.... An intelligence official said: 'For about four years, some 3,500 trained fighters and dozens of suicide bombers blindly followed Baitullah as he was the centre of gravity of terrorism in Pakistan.'"

"FO Denies Any Drone Accord With U.S.; Urges Pak Access To Civil Nuclear Technology" "The News" (08/10)

"Pakistan says the India-Israel nexus has posed serious threat to the regional security stressing that countries of the region should

take utmost care on this count particularly in view of the prevailing nuclear environment of the region. Foreign Office spokesman Abdul Basit said this in an exclusive interview with Online in Islamabad on Sunday. He went on to say that Pak-U.S. strategic collaboration was gaining momentum in war against terrorism. Drone attacks had caused more damage than benefit to Pakistan. However, no accord existed between Pakistan and the US with regard to drone attacks, he added."

"U.S. Was In League With Iran Protesters, Admits Clinton" "The News" (08/10)

"U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Sunday that the United States did a lot 'behind the scenes' to show support for demonstrators contesting Iran's disputed presidential election results, Clinton said in an interview with CNN broadcast on Sunday."

"11 Militants, 5 Lashkar Men Killed In Clash" "Dawn" (08/10)

"Eleven militants and five members of an anti-Taliban Lashkar were killed in a fierce gun battle in Khwaizai tehsil in Mohmand tribal region on Sunday morning, According to official sources."

"Blast Kills 2 Soldiers" "Dawn" (08/10)

"Two soldiers were killed and four others injured when their vehicle was hit by a bomb on the Miramshah-Mir Ali road on Sunday, according to official sources."

"Helicopters Target LI Hideout In Tirah" "Dawn" (08/10)

"Sources said that at least five helicopter gunships targeted the Lashkar-i-Islam hideouts in the remote Tirah valley of Khyber Agency on Sunday. Officials said that besides blowing up of an ammunition depot, seven vehicles of the militants were also destroyed. However, no loss of life was reported."

"Militants Loot FC Convoy In Kurram" "The News" (08/10)

"Suspected militants on Sunday looted convoy of the Frontier Corps (FC) that was transporting medicines and other goods to the blocked town of Parachinar in Kurram."

"U.S. Bigger Threat Than India: Pakistanis" "The Nation" (08/10)

"A survey commissioned by Al Jazeera has revealed a widespread disenchantment in Pakistan with the United States for interfering with what most people consider internal affairs. The polling was conducted by Gallup Pakistan - an organisation affiliated with the U.S.-based Gallup Inc -and more than 2,600 people took part."

"U.S. Pressure To Shun Pak, Iran Gas Pipe" "Pakistan Observer" (08/10)

"The government of Pakistan is under severe U.S. pressure to postpone Pak-Iran gas pipeline project due to which government is committing delay to formally get the project approved from the Federal Cabinet, a senior official in the Ministry of Petroleum on the condition of anonymity told 'Online.'"

"Obama To sharpen Af-Pak Goals" "The Nation" (08/10)

"President Barack Obama will next month send Congress a new plan for measuring progress in Pakistan and Afghanistan, in an effort to build confidence among wavering Democrats and give sharper direction to a costly and increasingly bloody war, according to White House officials."

"Baloch Republican Army (BRA) Kills Four More Cops" "The News" (08/10)

"Separatist rebels shot dead four more policemen and threatened to execute other hostages unless government withdraws troops and releases detainees in Balochistan. 'The bodies of four more policemen were found early on Sunday, a senior police official Kalim Ullah told reporters on Sunday.'"

"Baitullah Mehsud's Succession," an editorial in the center-right Urdu daily "Pakistan" (cir. 10,000) (08/10)

"There can be no doubt that Baitullah Mehsud's death and withdrawal of militants from Swat has strengthened Pakistan's position; and if need be, Pakistan can talk with the Taliban from a position of strength. However, no one should be under the illusion that Taliban can be eliminated through force alone. Along with force, efforts must also continue to find a political solution to the issue."

"Succession After Baitullah," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (08/10)

"Succession in the TTP is not going to be easy. And the TTP is never going to be the same. All qualities among the Pashtun are individual, above all organizational talent not often found in warriors. This is the time for Pakistan to move forward and reclaim its sovereignty from the Taliban. Al Qaeda is in trouble in this transition. The drones are getting too close for comfort, and more and more people will now be inclined to take money to betray its leaders' whereabouts. Under the circumstances, the news that Al Qaeda may move out of the mountains and into the cities is credible."

"Justification Of Drone Attacks," an editorial in the Peshawar-based Urdu-language daily "Mashriq" (cir. 55,000) (08/10)

"The reports of killing of the Taliban warlord Baitullah Mehsud have given good reason for the U.S. drone attacks, as this is the first high profile success for the United States, and it can try to convince the international community that its drone strikes aren't unjustified. Owing to this situation, the government must make public details of all the U.S. drone attacks, and their rate of success. One or two successes neither validate such attacks, nor can permit the U.S. to defy Pakistan's sovereignty. Even if the United States can achieve its targets through drone attacks, it has no right to assault a country. And if the U.S. considers the drone very effective tool, then it should transfer this technology to its frontline ally in this war."

"Wider Ripples?," an editorial in the populist, often sensational national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (08/10)

"Baitullah Mehsud was never a significant part of the Afghan equation, but his death will have undoubted consequences perhaps most particularly on the relationship between the Pakistan military and the Americans. Washington may now use his death to pressure Pakistan to 'do more' - which is going to challenge those in the military establishment whose ambivalent relationship with the Taliban tends to define them as future, if not current, assets.... Also, Mehsud's death will almost certainly bring an end to the long-planned but never executed operation in the Waziristans. This was a fight that the army would rather it did not have, if only because there was unlikely to be a clear-cut win and they would be facing an enemy entrenched over years and resourced to the eyeballs. Now, they can wait and watch as the serious internal schisms within the disparate groups that make up the Taliban translate into internecine conflict, obviating the need to conduct a full-scale operation. Assuming that Mehsud was killed by a drone it bolsters the American case for more of the same; and there has been a deafening silence from the ranks of those usually quick to condemn every infringement of our sovereignty. Mehsud's (presumed) death is significant but not definitive in terms of the wider conflict; a conflict which will probably outlive any number of 'leaders.'"

"Taliban Shootout," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (08/10)

"The episode throws a garish light into the workings of the Taliban in Pakistan, where it seemed that the law of the jungle operated at its most naked, and where leadership was only retained by those most ready to kill. And not kill the enemy, but one another. It also signals the beginning of the breakdown of the Tehrik that has been predicted for it, but those emerging from this internal struggle

will be fiercer and more hardened in purpose than before.... The late Baitullah's network is still virtually intact, and unless it is dismantled, the government can be sure that someone will take it over."

"Fighting Militants," an editorial in the populist, often sensational national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (08/10)

"Key Taliban figures, including Maulana Fazlullah, remain unaccounted for. Recent militant incursions into Shangla and other districts of NWFP indicate they retain their capacity to carry out plans. This is disturbing. Many of Swat's wealthier and more influential residents have chosen not to return to it. This means that the ordinary people left to survive on their own will have even less capacity to ward off a militant threat. This is a possibility that needs to be guarded against. The 'Lashkars' need to be built into a civilian defence force able to keep watch over the valley and keep it safe."

"More Alive Than Dead?," an op-ed by Ejaz Haider in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (08/10)

"Rehman Malik says if Baitullah Mehsud (BM) is not dead the Taliban should give evidence that he is alive. This one sure takes the cake. It's almost like saying the onus of proving that he is alive is on the Taliban because we 'know' he is dead! But why the hell would the Taliban give evidence of whether BM is or is not dead? The suspense works to their advantage, especially if the government cannot give conclusive proof of his death. Even so we now have reports suggesting BM is planning his own video release to prove he is alive and kicking! It is of course possible that BM is in fact dead and the Taliban are buying time to work out a succession process before they announce that he has died of natural causes or some such thing."

"Foreign Buying On Baitullah Mehsud's Death News!" news analysis by Afzal Bajwa in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (08/10)

"Pakistan's capital market that registered healthy buying on part of the foreign players during the week ending Friday last is most likely to get fresh attention of international investors after the news about Taliban leader's death.... The potent fundamental indicators of the market coupled with sentiment boosting news about the death of most wanted leader of militant's Baitullah Mehsud helped bulls to prevail towards the end of the week under-review."

"Afghan Elections," an op-ed by Zafar Hilaly in the populist, often sensational national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (08/10)

"Confronted by the existential threat posed by the Taliban/Al Qaida combine, Pakistan and Afghanistan are doomed to cooperate. They need to engage purposely and wholeheartedly because if they remain at odds with each other, or work at cross-purposes, both will suffer. Something approaching friendship must be forged. The animus and suspicion that has traditionally existed won't do."

(All circulation figures are based on estimation)
Feierstein